



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

New materialism and social justice

Citation for published version:

Mcgregor, C & Knox, J 2016, 'New materialism and social justice: New materialism and social justice a space for productive entanglement, or a political cul-de-sac?', New Materialism Conference 2016, Warsaw, Poland, 21/09/16 - 23/09/16.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Abstract for new materialism conference

New materialism and social justice: Productive entanglement or political cul-de-sac?

Recent developments in new materialist (NM) politics have surfaced the problem of what social justice might look like in the wake of the post-human. The academic spaces through which NM has produced its own situated knowledges have re-theorised the 'social'. To an extent, these spaces have developed in isolation from established spaces of social justice scholarship. In NM, the 'social' is recuperated in a flat ontology, as a mere synonym for the 'ecological' (Bryant 2014, p. 192). In this context, one might be tempted to simply conclude that social justice be jettisoned as a normative concept in NM politics altogether. However, NM's political roots in feminist praxis suggest otherwise. Therefore, this re-theorisation of the 'social' requires a re-theorisation of 'social justice' and its various dimensions – distributive, recognitive and participatory (Fraser 2005). NM claims that a 'quasi-vitalist' (e.g. Bennett 2010), 'post-humanist' (e.g. Braidotti 2013, Bryant 2014) or 'alien phenomenological' (Bogost 2012) sensibility provides a more productive intellectual framework for thinking through the seemingly intractable problems of our times, from climate change to techno-capitalism. This sensibility prompts reconsideration of who and what can be considered legitimate subjects, and indeed agents, of social (in)justice (Haraway 1988). With this in mind, we re-consider Fraser's conceptualisation of social justice in the wake of NM. Specifically, a theory of distributed agency aims to call our attention to complex material entanglements of flesh, machine, culture and nature in order that we have better roadmaps for political intervention. But intervention to what end? NM scholarship has been critiqued as a process of 'bolting on' complexity theory to a tacit humanist politics (Cudworth and Hobdin 2014). This paper will clarify and critically interrogate the relationship between the analytical utility and normative commitments of NM in the context of social justice and show it to be largely under-theorised.

Keywords

Social Justice, New Materialism, Normativity, Politics, Agency

References

- Bennet, J. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press
- Bogost, I. 2012. *Alien Phenomenology, or What it's Like to be a Thing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Braidotti, R. 2013. *The Posthuman*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bryant, L. 2015. *Onto-Cartography: an ontology of machines and media*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press
- Fraser, N. 2005. Reframing Justice in a Globalizing World, *New Left Review*, 36, pp. 69-88.
- Haraway, D. (1988) *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), pp .575-599.

